

Facilitating Access to Skilled Talent (FAST)

Interim Evidence Report

April 2023

Blueprint

This report was produced as part of a project funded by the Future Skills Centre (FSC), with financial support from the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

FSC is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead. The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint ADE, and The Conference Board of Canada

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Future Skills Centre or the Government of Canada.



Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Introduction	6
1.1 About the Scaling Up Skills Development Portfolio	7
1.2 About FAST	7
2. Evidence-Generation Approach	9
2.1 Blueprint's Evidence Framework.	9
2.2 FAST's Learning Agenda	12
2.3 Data Limitations	14
3. Key Learnings	15
3.1 Program Uptake	15
3.2 Program Experience	17
3.3 Program Outcomes	21
4. Discussion and Implications	24
4.1 Key Takeaways	24
4.2 Continuous Improvement in Practice.	25
Conclusion	26
Appendix A: Common Outcomes Framework	27
Appendix B: Diary Study Sample	29
Appendix C: Exit Survey Demographics	30

Acknowledgements

About the Future Skills Centre

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As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead.

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About Blueprint

[Blueprint](#) was founded on the simple idea that evidence is a powerful tool for change. We work with policymakers and practitioners to create and use evidence to solve complex policy and program challenges. Our vision is a social policy ecosystem where evidence is used to improve lives, build better systems and policies and drive social change.

Our team brings together a multidisciplinary group of professionals with diverse capabilities in policy research, data analysis, design, evaluation, implementation and knowledge mobilization.

As a consortium partner of the Future Skills Centre, Blueprint works with partners and stakeholders to collaboratively generate and use evidence to help solve pressing future skills challenges.

About the Scaling up skills development initiative

This work is part of the FSC and Blueprint Scaling Up Skills Development Portfolio which aims to strengthen Canada's skills development ecosystem by providing investment, technical assistance and evidence support to help scale a diverse portfolio of innovative skills projects. Through the initiative, FSC has granted \$25.9 million to nine different programs, one of which is FAST.

For more information about the Scaling Up Skills Development initiative and the progress of the other eight projects, please refer to the [Scaling Design Report](#).



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Executive Summary

Newcomers to Canada face barriers to accessing the Canadian labour market, such as a lack of recognition of foreign credentials, limited familiarity with Canadian workplace norms and a lack of Canadian work experience. As a result, newcomers are often underemployed, meaning their skills and experience are mismatched with their occupation after immigration.

Facilitating Access to Skilled Talent (FAST) works to address these challenges. As an online skills assessment and development platform, FAST builds newcomers' occupational knowledge and competencies before and upon arrival in Canada. The program is designed and delivered by the Immigrant Employment Council of BC (IEC-BC).

In the spring of 2021, FAST was selected to join the Scaling Up Skills Development Portfolio, an initiative of Blueprint and the Future Skills Centre that helps promising skills solutions reach new communities across Canada. Through the Portfolio, the program received a grant to support its scaling journey by expanding to new participants and sectors.

To capture insights on the scaling process, Blueprint developed a novel approach to evidence generation that aligns with the stages of the innovation cycle. This report shares preliminary results about how FAST is helping newcomers navigate the Canadian labour market, with a focus on measuring program uptake, participant experience, and early employment outcomes. A future report will share findings on longer-term outcomes.

FAST's Learning Agenda

Our learning agenda for FAST focuses on three broad sets of questions:

- 1. Program uptake:** Who does FAST reach? How does program reach vary across streams? Do participants who begin FAST complete programming? Does completion differ by stream and participant characteristics?
- 2. Program experience:** What are participants' experiences with FAST? Are participants satisfied with the program? How do perceptions vary by participant background and experience? What updates can be made to improve FAST and to support successful implementation?
- 3. Program outcomes:** What employment-related outcomes do participants achieve? How do these outcomes differ by participant characteristic and stream?

What seems to be working well

- IEC-BC has surpassed its target enrolment of 950 newcomers for the FAST program, as of March 2023.
- At four months post-registration, 62% of program participants report that FAST is helping them prepare for employment and 72% report that FAST is supporting them to understand how their skills and competencies relate to their desired industry.
- Over 60% of FAST participants are satisfied with their experience in the program. Participants in Accounting & Finance commended tailored, contextualized information specific to their occupation and those in Biotech appreciated the access to industry-recognized certification.
- Workplace culture training is seen as the most helpful program component of FAST. Participants find that this content provides them with a better understanding of Canadian norms and values and normalizes experiences of culture shock.

What we need to understand better and possibly improve

- Participant interest in the program seems to be concentrated in Biotech and IT, with low uptake in Skilled Trades and Culinary Arts. It remains to be seen whether and how future immigration flows and program marketing tactics might affect this pattern.
- Most participants engage selectively with the FAST program, with 23% completing the full set of modules. Further exploration is needed to understand whether program completion is a meaningful indicator of program success or participant benefit, as well as whether this engagement pattern is associated with program design factors or participant satisfaction.
- Forty-five percent of FAST participants are employed at five weeks post-enrolment. Moving forward, Blueprint will be exploring approaches to generate evidence on the relationship between program participation and employment outcomes, given that FAST is one of several inputs in a newcomer's employment journey.
- Some participants are requesting more opportunities to interact with program staff, employers and other newcomers in the FAST program. In response to this learning, IEC-BC has introduced more peer-to-peer and staff touchpoints, and is working with employers to share information about the program, its potential role in hiring practices and how employers and candidates might eventually connect through the FAST platform.

Next steps

Blueprint and IEC-BC will continue to generate evidence on FAST's scaling journey. Upcoming activities will explore longer-term insights about program effectiveness, stakeholder perceptions and experiences and linkages to Statistics Canada administrative data. Additional evidence generation activities will also focus on the newly launched Seniors Care stream. Insights on the scaling process more broadly will be shared in a portfolio-wide report on all Scaling Up Skills Development initiatives.



1. Introduction

Canada's labour market is undergoing significant transformation. In a context of remote work, digital disruption and climate change, people in Canada need to adapt their skills to meet changing workplace demands. Canadian governments, employers and service providers are trying to meet this challenge: there are a wide range of skills development interventions being designed and piloted across the country. But too many pilots fail to reach the scale needed to serve more people and more places, limiting their impact for Canadians.

To address these challenges, Blueprint and the [Future Skills Centre](#) have partnered on the Scaling Up Skills Development Portfolio to help our most promising solutions reach communities across Canada. Facilitating Access to Skilled Talent (FAST) is one of the [10 interventions](#) in this portfolio.

FAST is an online skills assessment and development platform designed by the **Immigrant Employment Council of BC (IEC-BC)**. FAST addresses pervasive underemployment among skilled immigrants by proactively building their occupational knowledge and competencies before and upon arrival in Canada. In the spring of 2021, IEC-BC received a grant to become part of the Scaling Up Skills Development Portfolio¹ because of its relevance to FSC's strategic goals and high levels of demand for the service. As part of this grant, IEC-BC is continuing to expand FAST to reach more people. IEC-BC is also collaborating with the BC Care Providers Association to add a new Seniors Care stream to respond to the labour needs for clinical and non-clinical occupations in the long-term care sector.

This report shares early insights about how FAST is helping newcomers navigate the Canadian labour market and is focused on program uptake, participant experience and early employment outcomes. Data for this analysis was collected from September 2021 to June 2022. A future report will focus on longer-term outcomes. Insights on the scaling process more broadly will be shared in a portfolio-wide report on all Scaling Up Skills Development Portfolio initiatives.

¹ IEC-BC's relationship with FSC began in 2019 with a grant to: (1) add two new streams (Accounting & Finance and Culinary Arts) and (2) offer the program in Manitoba, Ontario and Nova Scotia. As part of this first expansion, Blueprint conducted an early-stage evaluation to understand the experience of participants and service delivery partners. The evaluation demonstrated that newcomers found value in FAST, particularly in helping them gain a better understanding of the Canadian workplace culture. We identified key areas for improvement, such as exploring opportunities to provide more targeted sectoral content for FAST participants and continuing to invest in sustainable partnerships with service delivery partners.

1.1 About the Scaling Up Skills Development Portfolio

The [Scaling Up Skills Development Portfolio](#) is strengthening Canada's skills development ecosystem by supporting a diverse set of organizations to scale their innovative skills initiatives. It is an opportunity to disrupt the current "one-study-at-a-time" approach to evidence building in favour of continuous evidence generation and program improvement. The hope is that this approach will better produce the quality and quantity of evidence needed to help promising interventions progress in their scaling journey.

Scaling an intervention means increasing delivery to reach and serve more people. Social innovations have scaled when their reach and impact grow to match the level of need. While this definition of scaling is relatively simple, the process is inherently complex. Scaling social innovations is almost always a non-linear, multi-step process that happens over a period of years, not months – if it happens at all.

The organizations we partner with are on a *scaling journey*: through our evidence-generation process we are helping to understand what works, but equally, what doesn't work and why and how we can use data to improve. This means adapting expectations and mobilizing evidence to optimize program delivery at every step. By taking this scaling journey, organizations can learn how to deepen the impact of their programs. For more information about Blueprint's approach to scaling, see our [Scaling Social Innovation](#) webpage.

1.2 About FAST

Newcomers to Canada are too often underemployed, meaning their skills and experience are mismatched with their occupation after immigration.² Many face compounded barriers to accessing the Canadian labour market, such as a lack of recognition of foreign credentials, limited familiarity with Canadian workplace norms and a lack of Canadian work experience. As a result, some newcomers are unable to find employment that is aligned with their education, skills and experience and that is at a similar level of seniority as the last job they held before arriving in Canada. The intent of Canada's immigration policy is to ensure the country has the workers it needs to fill critical labour market gaps and support a strong economy. To realize this intention, we need a strong employment and training ecosystem that helps support newcomers to leverage their skills and fully integrate into the Canadian economy.

FAST supports newcomers in accelerating their job search by helping them better understand their target occupation and industry along with broader workplace culture. FAST has six sector streams: Information Technology (IT) & Data Services, Biotechnology & Life Sciences, Skilled Trades, Accounting & Finance, Culinary Arts and Seniors Care.

Each stream includes some or all of the following content:

- **Workplace culture:** Provides orientation to Canadian cultural and workplace norms and cultural and essential skills competency assessments.³
- **Technical competency:** Occupation-specific content is developed in collaboration with industry partners,⁴

2 Ng, E., & Gagnon, S. (2020). Employment Gaps and Underemployment for Racialized Groups and Immigrants in Canada: Current Findings and Future Directions. Future Skills Centre. <https://fsc-ccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/EmploymentGaps-Immigrants-PPF-JAN2020-EN.pdf>

3 Workplace readiness assessments are available for Accounting, IT & Data Services and Biotechnology & Life Sciences.

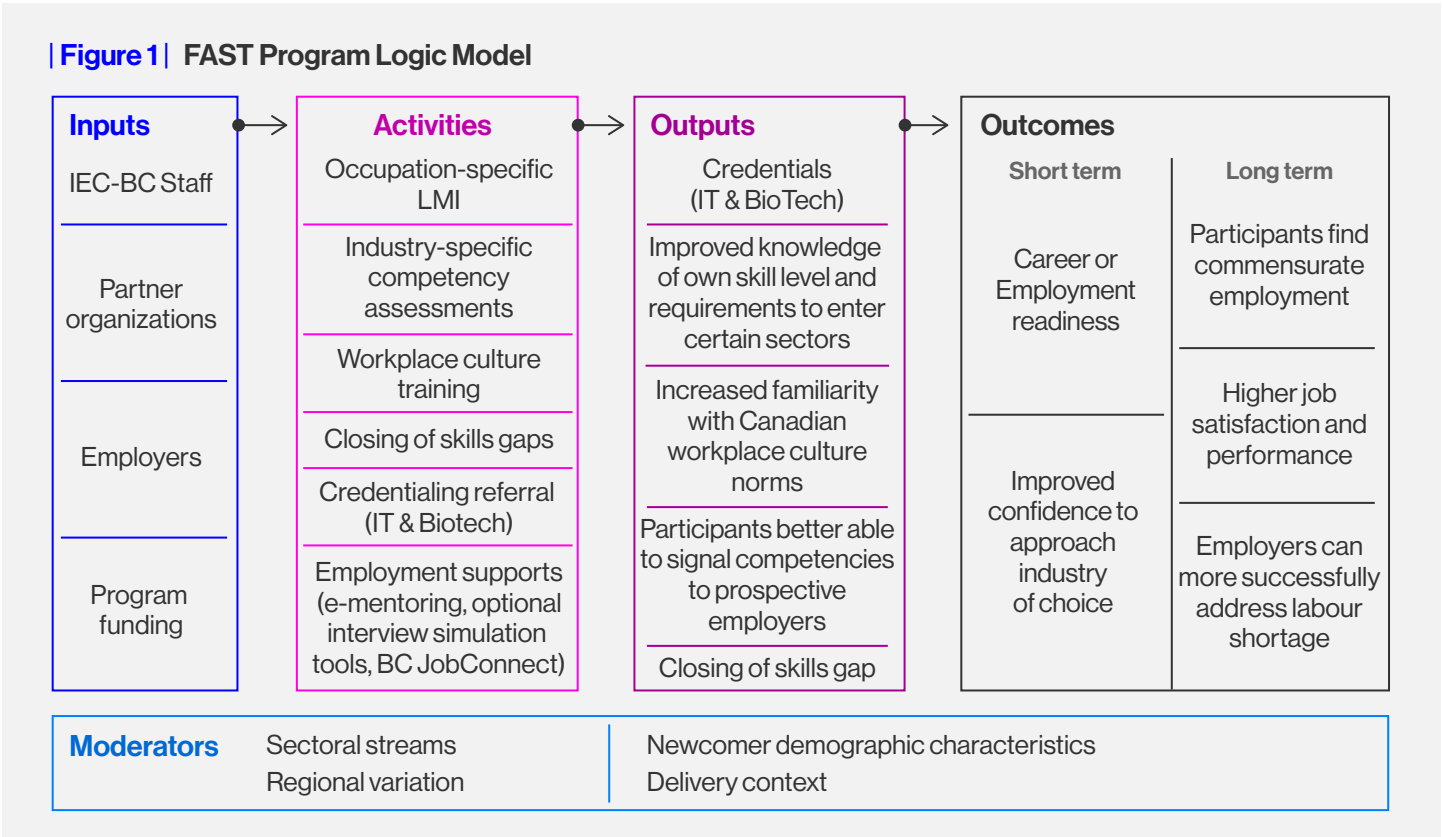
4 Industry partners include ICTC, BioTalent, and BC Care Providers Association.

which allows participants to test their occupation-specific skills, strengths and gaps.⁵

- **Referral for skills designation:** In the IT & Data Services and Biotechnology & Life Sciences streams, participants who complete FAST are referred to industry partners for credentialing services (e.g., IT professional designation, Microsoft certifications, BioTalent certification). Participants in these streams are also referred to the Skills Passport for Newcomers in Tech (SPRINT) program, an initiative that supports internationally trained immigrants to relaunch their careers in Canada.
- **Job search and career navigation supports:** Participants can apply to job postings on BC JobConnect⁶ and attend group e-mentoring sessions to connect with other newcomers, including professionals in their target industry.

IEC-BC aims to make FAST accessible to as many newcomers as possible. The program is open to newcomers that: (1) have been approved to immigrate to Canada, (2) have two to five years of work experience in one of the six sectoral streams and (3) have a language proficiency of at least Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) level 6.⁷

Figure 1 illustrates the program logic model. In the short term, the program’s objective is to increase the employment readiness of newcomers and improve their confidence to enter their industries of interest. IEC-BC expects that the program will enable participants to quickly find employment that is aligned with their skills and experience.



5 Technical assessments are available for Accounting, Culinary Arts and Skilled Trades.

6 Participants arriving in other provinces are referred to service providers in their region.

7 IEC-BC does not ask for CLB certificates and views language proficiency as an asset rather than a requirement. Service delivery partners refer clients even if they do not meet the CLB (or other) requirements.



2. Evidence-Generation Approach

2.1 Blueprint's Evidence Framework

To support the scaling up of promising interventions, Blueprint developed a novel approach to evidence generation that fits within the stages of the [innovation cycle](#). By understanding an intervention's stage of development, we can determine the most appropriate tools to advance it to the next stage.

In a well-functioning innovation ecosystem, projects would move along the innovation cycle starting with needs assessment, conceptualization and design, and then delivery, testing and iteration (**Figure 2**). For those interventions that are proven to work, the goal is to expand to meet the need at scale and create system changes to institutionalize the innovation.

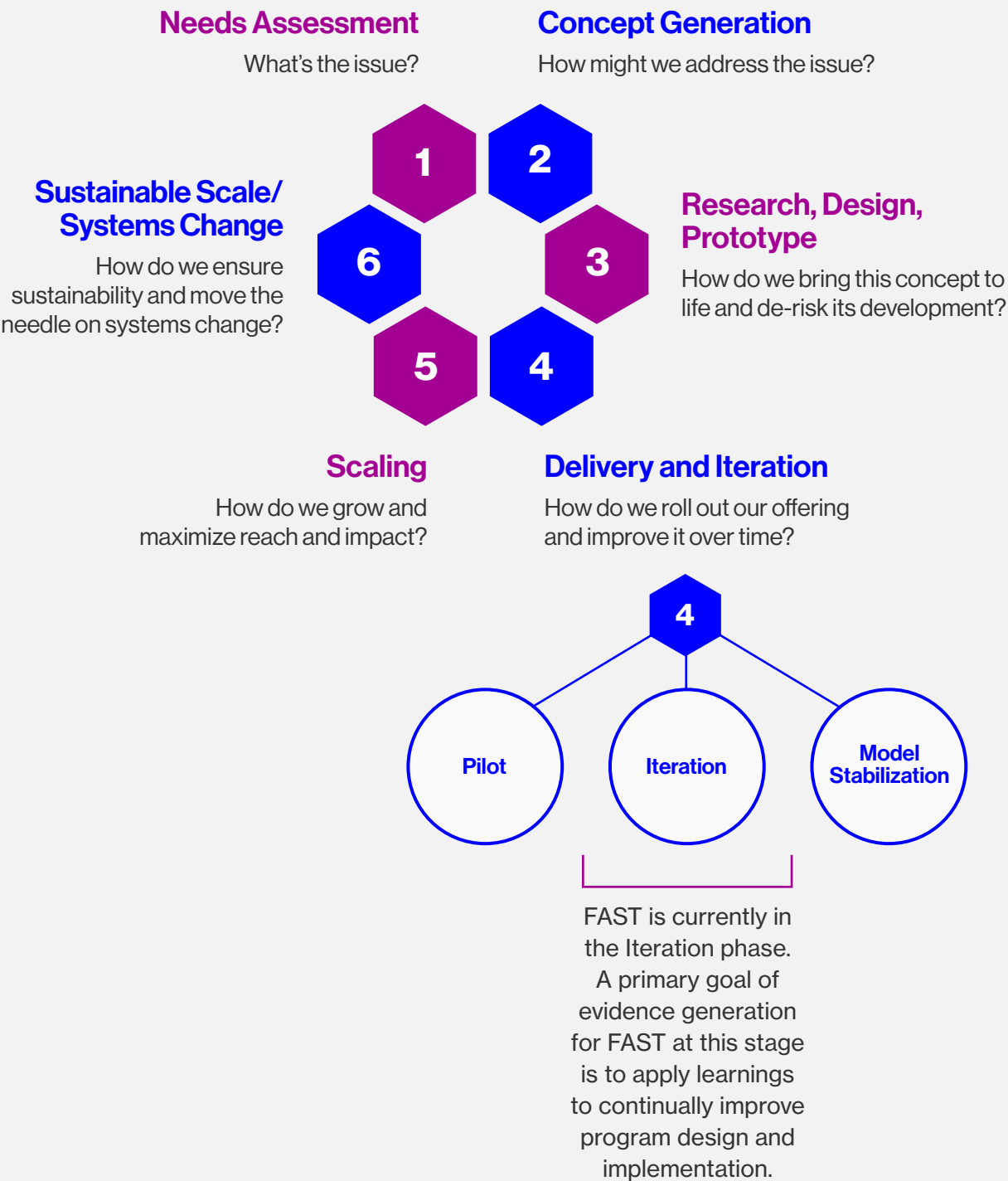
All the interventions in the Scaling Up Skills Development Portfolio are in the Delivery and Iteration stage of the cycle. Within this stage, we distinguish three phases of delivery maturity:

- **Pilot phase** – In this early phase, evidence activities focus on supporting implementation and generating preliminary evidence of effectiveness.
- **Iteration phase** – In this phase, we continue to build our understanding of what is working and what is not working and why. The emphasis is on evidence activities to support continuous improvement.
- **Model stabilization phase** – In this phase, as interventions solidify their core program model, the focus shifts to increasing rigour in measuring outcomes and impact. It includes cost benefit analysis to inform a business case for greater scale.

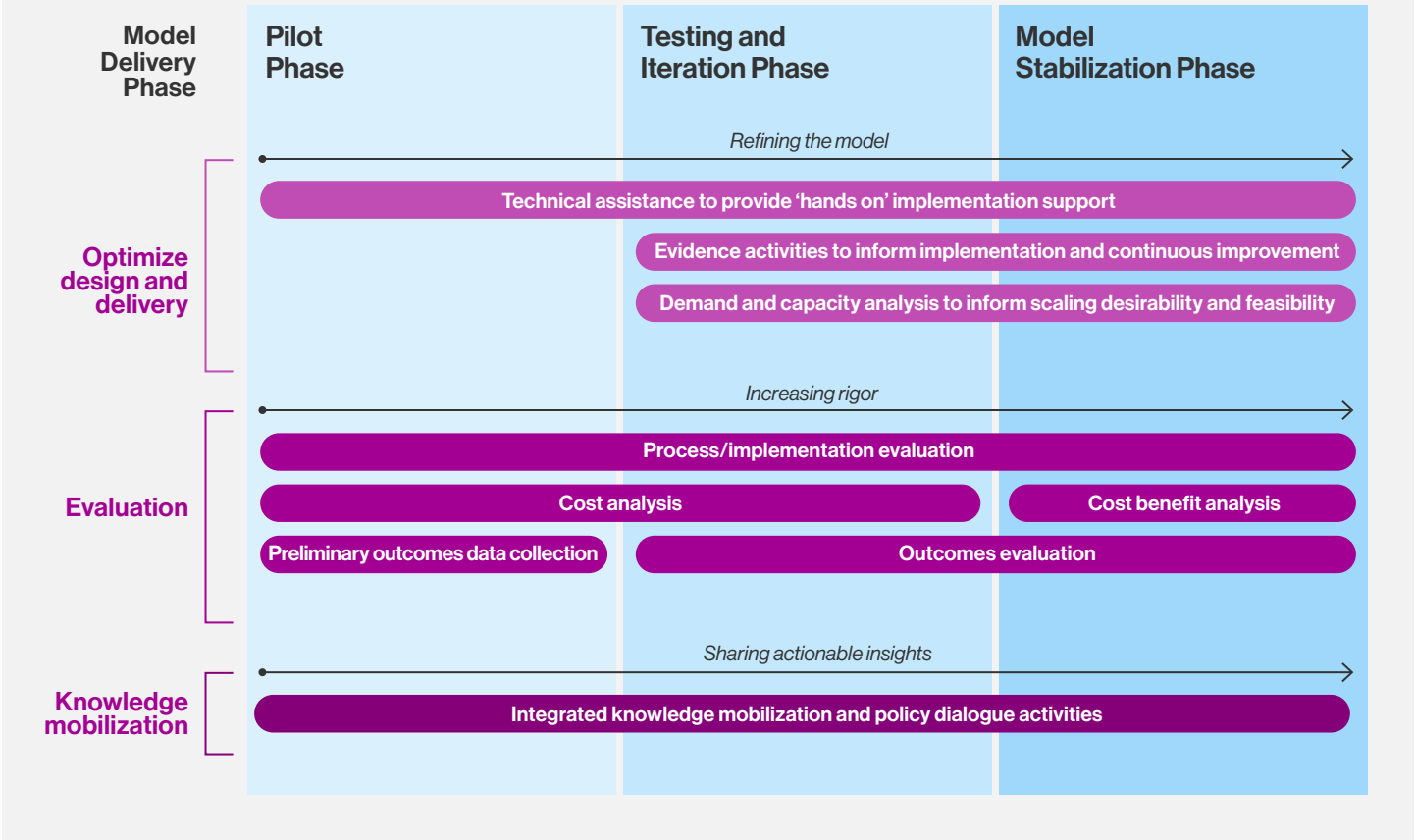
While presented as three progressive phases, the actual path an intervention takes is more complex. Some interventions in the pilot phase may not move forward to the iteration phase; rather, they will require going back to the drawing board. Similarly, some interventions in the iteration phase will require a series of rapid learning and continuous improvement cycles before they are ready for the model stabilization phase. And, of course, even interventions that reach the model stabilization phase will need to continuously learn and adapt to new needs, such as changing demographics, employer expectations and/or labour market conditions.

Figure 3 provides a closer look at the Evidence Framework that Blueprint uses to develop customized evidence plans for each of the interventions we work with.

| Figure 2 | The Innovation Cycle and Blueprint’s Evidence-Generation Framework



| Figure 3 | Blueprint’s Evidence-Generation Framework – Helping Interventions Move from Stage 4 to 5



2.2 FAST's Learning Agenda

Learning questions

Our learning agenda for FAST focuses on three broad sets of questions:

- 1. Program uptake:** Who does FAST reach? How does program reach vary across streams? Do participants who begin FAST complete programming? Does completion differ by stream and participant characteristics?
- 2. Program experience:** What are participants' experiences with FAST? Are participants satisfied with the program? How do perceptions vary by participant background and experience? What updates can be made to improve FAST and to support successful implementation?
- 3. Program outcomes:** What employment-related outcomes do participants achieve? How do these outcomes differ by participant characteristic and stream?

Indicators

Our measurement approach includes indicators that are specific to FAST as well as a set of common indicators that are measured for every intervention in the Scaling Up Skills Development Portfolio.

Common indicators are drawn from Blueprint's Common Outcomes Framework⁸ and include:

- **Intermediate outcomes** that reflect participant experiences or capture milestones, such as program completion
- **Long-term outcomes** such as employment and educational outcomes that measure the long-term effectiveness of each project

Using a consistent approach to measuring outcomes is part of our commitment to understanding how each intervention in the Portfolio is reaching people across Canada and allows us to measure long-term outcomes using Statistics Canada's Social Data Linking Environment. For more information on Blueprint's Common Outcomes Framework see [Appendix A](#).

⁸ The Common Outcomes Framework was developed in consultation with our partners and was informed by review of employment-related outcomes frameworks and measurement approaches both within Canada and internationally.

| **Table 1** | Data sources

Data source	Dates	Participants enrolled (response rate)	Description
Administrative data	Sep 2021 – Jun 2022	494/565 (87%)	Administrative data collected by IEC-BC at registration for participants who consented to the research. Includes socio-demographic characteristics, stream and arrival status.
5-week survey	Sep 2021 – Jun 2022	146/494 (30%)*	Survey administered by Blueprint five weeks after registration to capture satisfaction and socio-demographic characteristics.
3-month follow-up survey	Dec 2021 – Jun 2022	79/240 (33%)**	Survey administered by Blueprint three months after the 5-week survey to capture employment outcomes.
Interviews	Jan 2022 – Apr 2022	11	Semi-structured interviews to generate evidence on program experience and satisfaction and the perceived effect of the program on employment outcomes. Participants were selected to reflect a mix of characteristics across FAST completion status, commensurate employment, ⁹ salary and enrolment status in SPRINT. ¹⁰
Diary study ¹¹	Jan 2022 – May 2022	10	Four-week diary study during which participants were contacted once per week through WhatsApp to share their thoughts about FAST in real time, with prompts about career navigation. Two in-depth interviews, focused on career pathways and goals in relation to FAST, were conducted with each participant. One interview was conducted at the time of enrolment and the other was four weeks after enrolment. Participants were selected to reflect a mix of characteristics across program stream, newcomer arrival status, gender, age and referral source. ¹²

Notes:

* Of the 494 consenting participants, 397 exit surveys had been scheduled by end of June 2022. This would translate to a 37 percent response rate (146 of 397).

** Of the 494 consenting participants, 240 three-month follow-up surveys had been scheduled by end of June 2022.

9 Commensurate employment is defined as employment that matches a candidate's education, skills and work experience, and is at a similar level of seniority as the last job they held before arriving in Canada.

10 The Skills Passport for Newcomers in Tech (SPRINT) program is an initiative designed to support internationally trained immigrants to relaunch their careers in Canada; it is available to participants in the Biotechnology & Life Sciences and IT & Data Services streams.

11 A diary study is a qualitative research method that allows researchers to capture a participant's real-time, in-depth experience by following along a participant's journey over a period of time.

12 For information about our diary study sample, please refer to [Appendix B](#).

2.3 Data Limitations

Five-week survey timing

The first survey was administered five weeks after a participant's enrolment date, based on learning from IEC-BC that participants take an average of five weeks to complete FAST. However, given that FAST is a self-paced program, participants will inevitably be at different points in their journey at the five-week mark.

Variable enrolment across FAST streams

The diary study and semi-structured interviews were designed to capture a participant's experiences across the original five sector streams. Due to low enrolment in Skilled Trades and Culinary Arts, we were unable to recruit participants in those two streams for qualitative research.

Sampling by program completion status

Our sampling strategy for semi-structured interviews focused on four criteria: program completion, commensurate employment, salary and enrolment in SPRINT. Given that most participants engaged with only some of the FAST modules (23% completed the full program), we experienced challenges recruiting participants that were both program completers and had achieved specific outcomes, such as being employed in commensurate roles.

As our work progresses, we will dig deeper into whether completion is a crucial aspect of the FAST logic model. Our diary studies provide some early clues; it may be that participants benefit from partial participation and that they may be making conscious choices to learn only from those units they find relevant. Conversely, it is possible that participants experience barriers to completion. Our next round of data collection will continue to explore these possibilities.

3. Key Learnings

3.1 Program Uptake

What we're learning

- FAST is reaching its participant target, though enrollment is concentrated in Biotech and IT, with low uptake in Skilled Trades and Culinary Arts.
- The majority of FAST participants are landed newcomers, highly educated and racialized.
- Most participants typically engage with a selection of program modules, while 23% complete the full program.

FAST is reaching its participant target, though enrollment is concentrated in Biotech and IT, with low uptake in Skilled Trades and Culinary Arts.

IEC-BC has surpassed its FAST target enrolment of 950 clients by March 2023. Among 494 participants that enrolled in FAST between September 2021 and June 2022 and who consented to participate in this study, IT & Data Services was the most popular stream (50%), followed by Biotech & Life Sciences (29%) (see **Table 2**).

IEC-BC is exploring an array of factors, ranging from immigration flows to program marketing tactics, that may explain this concentration of participant interest in a few streams. IEC-BC is also actively promoting streams with low uptake and is monitoring how post-pandemic occupational demand is affecting enrolment.

| Table 2 | FAST Enrolment by Streams

Stream	Participants enrolled in research (%)
Stream 1: Skilled Trades	28 (6%)
Stream 2: Biotechnology & Life Sciences	142 (29%)
Stream 3: IT & Data Services	249 (50%)
Stream 4: Accounting & Finance	71 (14%)
Stream 5: Culinary Arts	4 (1%)
Total	494 (100%)

The majority of FAST participants are landed newcomers, highly educated and racialized.

Among newcomers who register for FAST, 82% reside in Canada at the time of registration, and 86% are landed immigrants. As shown in the five-week survey, 89% of respondents hold a bachelor's degree (40%) or higher (49%). Most identify as racialized (66%) and are legally married (75%).¹³ Geographically, more than half of survey respondents live in Ontario (34%) and Nova Scotia (26%). A full breakdown of participant demographics is found in **Appendix C**.

Most participants typically engage with a selection of program modules, while 23% complete the full program.

Since the program is online, self-paced and flexible, participants can choose to complete as much of the program as they find useful and relevant. 23% of participants complete the full set of modules, with differences by stream: 32% completing Biotechnology & Life Sciences, 21% completing IT & Data Services.¹⁴ Blueprint and IEC-BC are exploring the role of program design factors and participant preferences in shaping participant decisions to complete the program.

Insights from the diary study suggest that newcomers may be registering for FAST without the explicit intention of completing it. Most newcomers in the diary study report that they would sign up for any employment program or service that is free and potentially useful, even if they might not have the time to devote to it.

There are several possible factors that could be driving this type of participation: participants trying out FAST as one of several different programs they are trying, being referred to only a specific module, facing usability challenges once enrolled or leaving the program upon finding employment. Moving forward, it will be important to understand whether there are benefits to completing the full program or whether the program design itself affects completion. Our future evidence-generation activities will work to better understand these connections.

A diary study participant said:

“When we are very new in the city we try to engage in whatever organization that say “hey, I have help for you. I can support you” ... I tried reaching every organization people told me about it.”

We are continuing to gather evidence about whether program completion is a meaningful indicator of program success or participant benefit. We are also exploring whether program completion is related to program satisfaction and whether recruitment approaches should target maximum enrolment or focus more sharply on likely program completers.

¹³ Racialized status is based on two questions. In the first batch of surveys, it is a Yes/No response to “Are you racialized?” In the updated surveys, we consider racialized individuals to be all who respond to the question “Which race category describes you?” with a race other than “White.”

¹⁴ Since FAST is an online and self-paced program, we expect to see completion rates that are lower than typical cohort-based programs. Further, people may choose not to complete the program after they find employment.

3.2 Program Experience

What we're learning

- Just over 60% of participants feel satisfied with their experience with FAST at the five-week mark.
- Participants in the Biotech & Life Sciences stream view the industry-recognized certification as helpful for signalling competencies to employers.
- Participants find workplace culture training to be the most useful component of the program.
- Some participants are unclear about what information is offered in FAST and how the program can benefit their job search.
- Some participants struggle to navigate the FAST platform and engage with text-heavy information.
- Some participants want more opportunities for interaction with program staff and employers.

Perceived successes

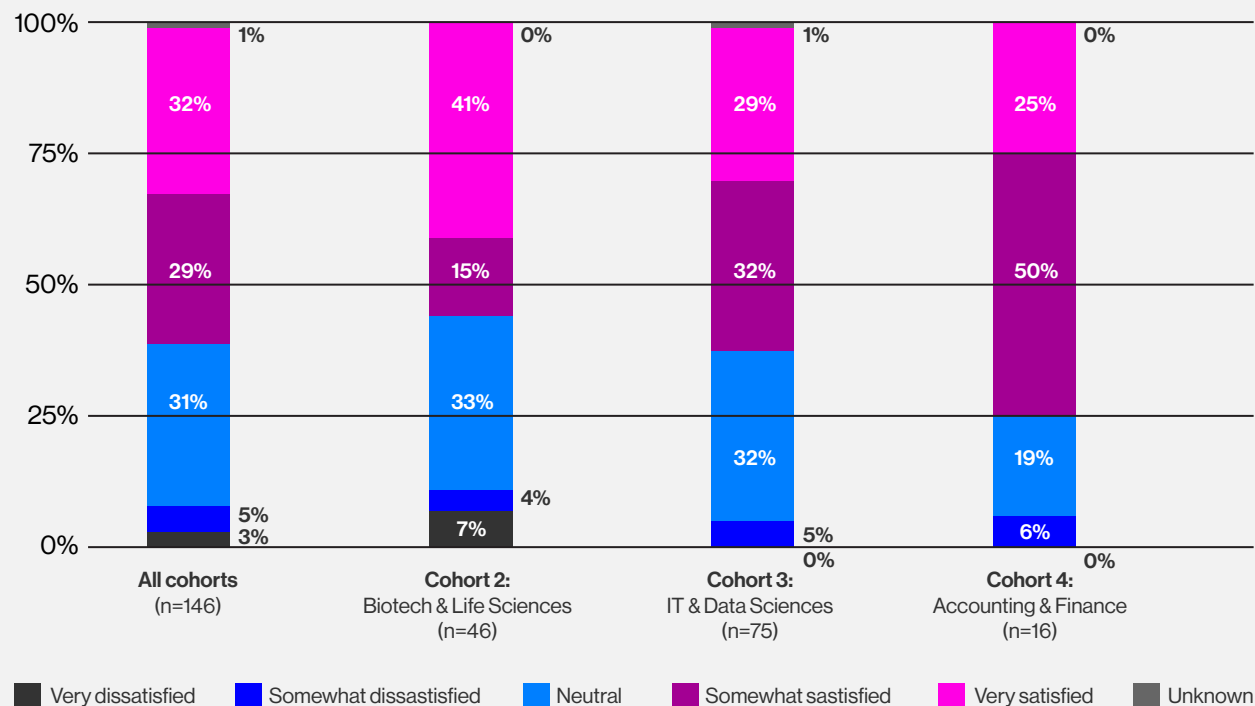
Just over 60% of participants feel satisfied with their experience with FAST at the five-week mark.

At five weeks post-registration, most participants (61%) are either somewhat (29%) or very (32%) satisfied with FAST (**Figure 4**). Fifty-nine percent of survey respondents report that they would definitely (45%) or had already (14%) recommended the program to someone else.

There are differences in satisfaction by stream (**Figure 4**), but given the small sample sizes, these differences should be interpreted with caution. Diary study participants signalled the role of occupation-specific content (e.g., information on regulated professions and associated credentials) in program satisfaction. For instance, diary study participants in the Accounting & Finance stream reported that unlike other programs and supports they had previously accessed, FAST provided them with an in-depth understanding of the potential career pathways in a packaged form. They learned what it looks like to work in junior and senior accounting roles, which types of jobs are regulated and certified and which certifications are important to have to enter regulated jobs.

Since occupation-specific content varies by stream, its role in program satisfaction will be explored in the final report.

Figure 4 | Overall Satisfaction with FAST Program by Stream*



*Interpret with caution due to small sample sizes.

Program completion is positively associated with program satisfaction. Participants who completed FAST were more likely to report higher levels of satisfaction regardless of their program stream (it is also possible that those that were more satisfied decided to complete the program).¹⁵ We find that 78% of completers are satisfied with FAST, while this is true among 54% of non-completers. Among completers, a higher percentage (50%) report being very satisfied compared to 25% among non-completers. Similarly, program completion is positively associated with the likelihood to recommend FAST.¹⁶ More completers (70%) would definitely recommend or had already recommended the program compared to non-completers (54%).

Participants in the Biotech & Life Sciences stream view the industry-recognized certification as helpful for signalling competencies to employers.

Interview and diary study participants in the Biotechnology & Life Sciences stream talked about accessing the BioSkills Recognition program offered by BioTalent Canada. Referral to this program was

15 A multiple regression analysis found a statistically significant relationship between program completion and program satisfaction at the 1% level after controlling for participant stream, with a regression coefficient of 0.5362 (SE = 0.3615, t = 2.799, p < 0.01).

16 A multiple regression analysis found a statistically significant relationship between program completion and the likelihood that participants recommend FAST to others at the 5% level after controlling for participant stream, with a regression coefficient of 0.3720 (SE = 0.1753, t = 2.121, p < 0.05).

An interview participant said:

“From the FAST course, I was taken to ... Bio talent ... That was when I became bio-ready and I got a certificate. I didn’t know that I would get a certificate without going to the school directly. ... It’s in my resume and I’m so proud to put it there.”

appreciated by many participants¹⁷ because it is well-respected in the field, available for free and offers access to tangible technical training and a job board.

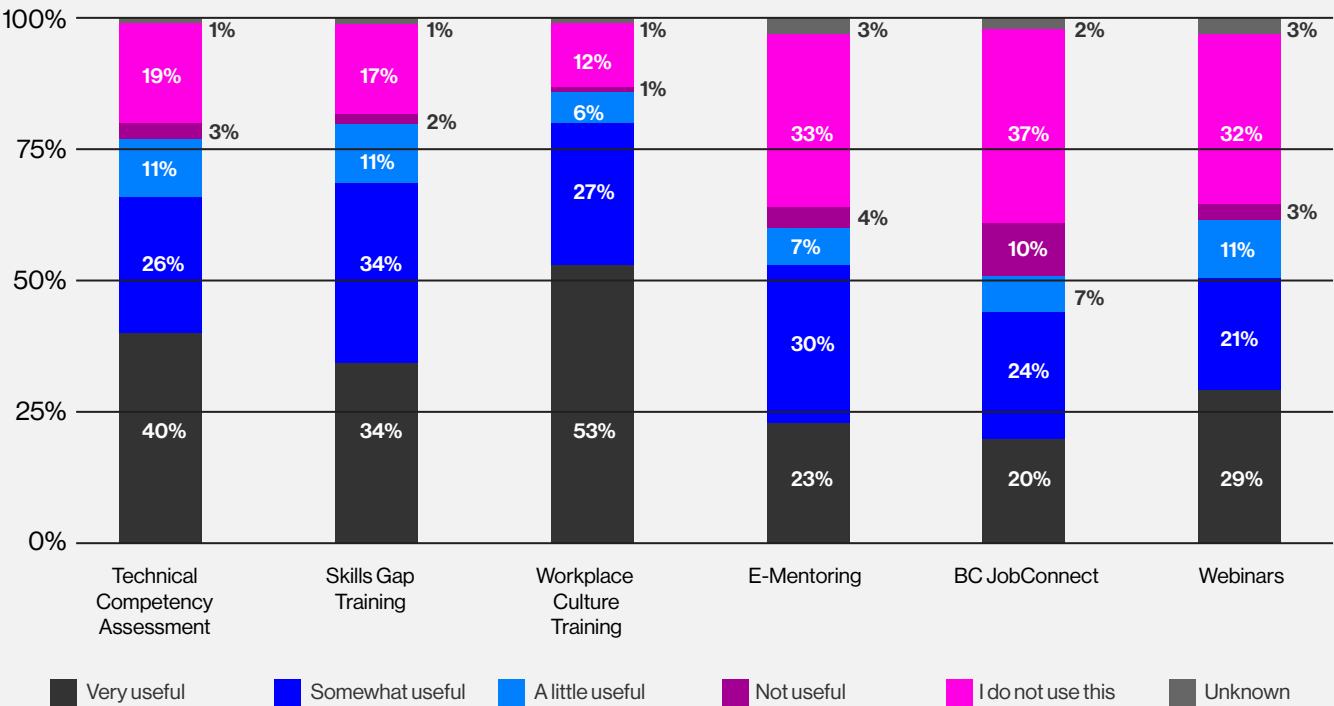
A diary study participant said:

“The other part that really interested me is when they were explaining about the culture shock. They explained step by step what’s happening ... [It made me think] maybe it’s going to happen with me, so there is a way out, and this is how you can get out of this ... It was really relaxing for me. And I got ... confident that, OK, I know these steps and if it’s going to happen, it’s normal. ”

Participants find workplace culture training to be the most useful component of the program.

Survey respondents report that workplace culture training is the most useful program component for supporting their job search (80%), followed by skills gap training (68%) and technical competency assessments (66%) (Figure 5). During the diary study and interviews, participants mentioned receiving valuable insights about working in Canada and the soft skills that are critical to succeed in a Canadian workplace. Participants also found information on non-verbal communication, culture shock and professional language helpful. Further research will explore how perceptions of workplace culture training may vary by previous exposure to different cultural settings; some established newcomers and those with previous experience living abroad feel that this content is repetitive.

Figure 5 | Perceived Usefulness of FAST Components in Participant Job Search (n=146)



17 In the final report, the research team will conduct quantitative analysis to explore how the satisfaction level of the Biotech and Life Sciences stream of FAST who received the Bio-Ready certification compares to those who did not receive certification. This data is not available at the time of writing this report.

Challenges

Some participants are unclear about what information is offered in FAST and how the program can benefit their job search.

Several newcomers we spoke to in the diary study are unclear about what FAST is and what it can do for them. This perception is true whether they were referred to FAST through an employment counsellor, a presentation in another program or found it on their own. These participants are unsure about opportunities to closely interact with fellow newcomers during the program, how to become part of a special candidate pool provided to employers¹⁸ or where to receive sector-specific bridging training. Some diary study participants are also unclear about whether FAST outputs and assessments would be shared with employers and whether they would receive a certificate of program completion.

A diary study participant said:

“I started getting emails and I didn’t really understand the program in the beginning. I know it was started for the IT industry but other than that I didn’t – I had no clue basically what this program was about.”

Some participants struggle to navigate the FAST platform and engage with text-heavy information.

A diary study participant said:

“After I finished, I wanted to put [the FAST completion certificate] on my resume. But what I’ve been questioning myself is [whether] people like employers know about it. Because if I put FAST and they don’t know what it means, then who knows what I’m getting?”

Some newcomers find it difficult to navigate the program’s interface and complete the assessments. Several diary study and interview participants are unclear about where to find program content, especially if content requires completing a previous module to access it. Others note that diagnostic tests are too long, and modules are often text heavy. Participant suggestions for more engaging and accessible learning include adding more visual content and dividing content into more manageable sections.¹⁹

Some participants want more opportunities for interaction with program staff and employers.

Several interview and diary study participants expressed a desire for more connection to FAST. Some are unaware of who to contact with questions, and others do not recall signing up for FAST until they receive an invitation to take part in the diary study.²⁰ However, a few

newcomers report that they feel very connected to FAST because they have been contacted by someone who represents the program, such as a settlement practitioner at an immigrant-serving organization, a program coordinator at IEC-BC or even a Blueprint team member. Participants want to be connected to employers as part of FAST and appreciate support from hiring platforms like BC JobConnect.

18 Participant’s referral to employers and invitations to employer networking events depend on the competencies highlighted in participant’s profile in BC JobConnect and how these match available positions offered by employers.

19 In the spring of 2022, IEC-BC incorporated additional video content in FAST to supplement learning, which a few participants in the diary study were able to access and found helpful.

20 IEC-BC has started to offer optional Q&A drop-in sessions with participants who have recently enrolled in FAST to clarify emerging questions and provide support as needed, which may help participants to feel more connected to FAST.

3.3 Program Outcomes

What we’re learning

- Five weeks post-registration, most participants find that FAST helps them prepare for employment in their industry in Canada.
- Almost half of participants are employed five weeks after enrolment.
- Employment rates and income seem to increase for participants over time.

Five weeks post-registration, most participants find that FAST helps them prepare for employment in their industry.

At five weeks post-registration, close to 60% of survey respondents agree that FAST is supporting their preparation for employment (Table 3). Sixty-six percent agree it is supporting their understanding of how their skills and competencies relate to their industry of interest. Sample sizes to date for the three-month follow-up survey are too small to interpret meaningfully. We will explore change over time as the sample size increases but have included these preliminary figures because they may suggest that outcomes are shifting.

| Table 3 | Career Readiness of FAST Participants

	5-week survey	3-month follow-up survey*
FAST has helped and supported my preparation for employment.	58% (N=146)	62% (N=78)
FAST has supported my understanding of how my skills and competencies relate to an industry of interest.	66% (N=110)	72% (N=36)

Note:

Percentages reported here are the share of survey respondents that “Agreed” or “Strongly agreed” with the statement.

*Interpret with caution due to small sample sizes.

Almost half of participants are employed five weeks after enrolment.

At five weeks after enrolment, 45% of participants are employed (Table 4), and this percentage is slightly higher among female participants (49%). Employment rates do not appear to vary by completion status: among respondents who complete FAST within five weeks, 45% are employed, compared with 44% of those who do not complete it.

| Table 4 | Employment Rates Among FAST Participants

	5-week survey (N=146)		3-month follow-up survey* (N=79)
Employment rate (all respondents)	45%	Employment rate (all respondents)	53%
Employment rate (completers, N=40)	45%	Employment rate (completers, N=26)	54%
Employment rate (non-completers, N=106)	44%	Employment rate (non-completers, N=53)	53%

*Interpret with caution due to small sample size.

Among employed respondents, 48% are employed in entry-level positions (not shown). Given that the vast majority of those employed in entry-level positions hold a bachelor’s degree (32%) or higher (58%), this “employment-education gap” represents an opportunity for improvement. This gap will be explored in future analysis.

Employment rates and income seem to increase for participants over time.

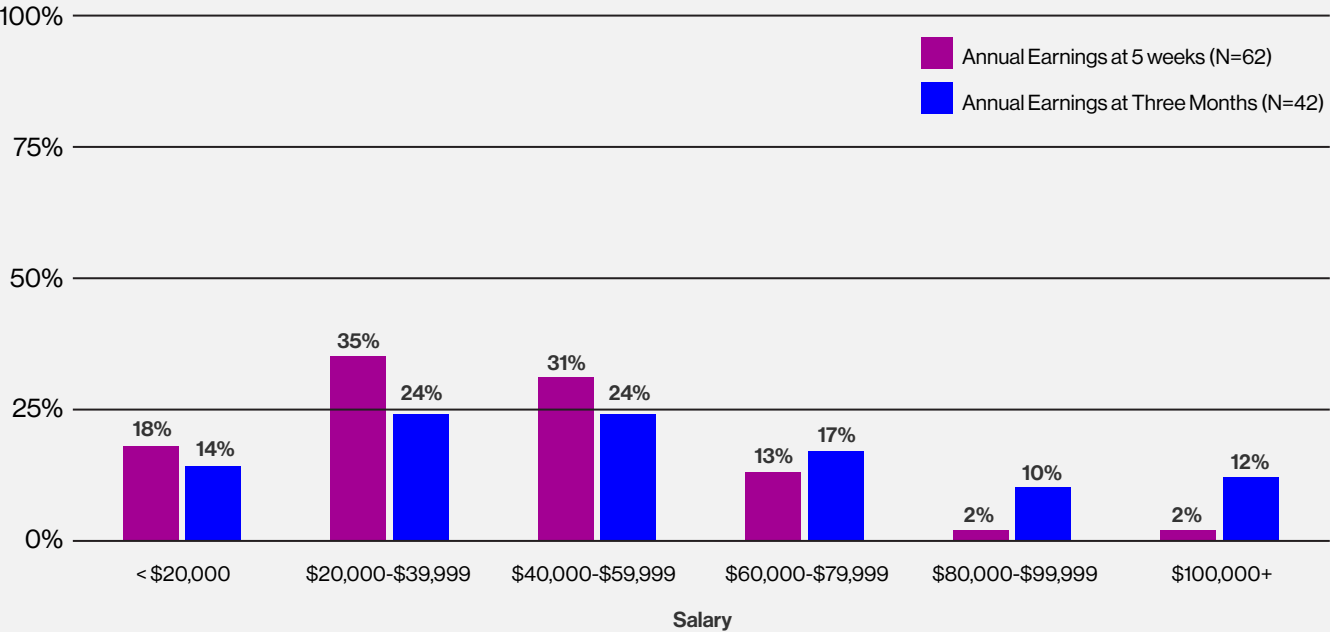
We find a small increase in employment rate over time from 45% five weeks after enrolment to 53% by the three-month follow-up survey (Table 4). Among respondents who are employed and report their earnings, 17% have yearly earnings of \$60,000 or more at the five-week mark (Figure 6).²¹ By the three-month follow-up, 39% of employed respondents report a salary of \$60,000 or more. There is also a larger proportion of respondents with a salary of more than \$80,000 at three months (22%) compared to five weeks (4%).²² These differences in employment income over time will be further explored as our sample size increases.

Moving forward, Blueprint will also explore approaches for generating evidence on the relationship between participation in FAST on the one hand and employment status and annual earnings on the other, given that FAST is one of several inputs in a newcomer’s employment journey.

21This includes those who reported salary on an annual basis as well as a calculation based on respondents who reported an hourly wage. Those who reported an hourly wage for their primary job were assumed to work 48 weeks in a given year.

22 This pattern is validated among the 14 participants that responded to the five-week survey and the three-month follow-up survey. Five weeks after enrolment, over 40% of respondents reported earning between \$20,000 and \$39,000 yearly, which dropped to around 20% three months later. Similarly, the share of participants earning between \$40,000-\$79,000 increased during this time.

| **Figure 6** | Annual Earnings at Five Week (n=62) and Three Months (n=42)*



*Interpret with caution due to small sample sizes.



4. Discussion and Implications

This report provides an early look at who FAST is reaching, how it is supporting employment goals and how its impact can be strengthened as it moves into further phases of scaling. Overall, FAST is on track to meet its enrolment targets and is positively contributing to newcomers' career readiness. While this report identifies several opportunities to strengthen FAST's design and delivery, it is important to note that IEC-BC has already made, or is in the process of making, a number of adjustments and is already seeing benefits.

4.1 Key Takeaways

What seems to be working well

- FAST has surpassed its target enrolment of 950 newcomers as of March 2023.
- In the three-month follow-up survey, 62% of participants report that FAST is helping them prepare for employment, and 72% report that FAST is supporting them to understand how their skills and competencies relate to their desired industry.
- Most participants are feeling satisfied with their experience in FAST, with positive views specifically expressed around tailored, contextualized information about their occupation and access to industry-recognized certification.
- Workplace culture training is seen as the most helpful component of FAST, offering participants a better understanding of Canadian norms and values and normalizing experiences of culture shock.

What we need to understand better and possibly improve

- Most participants engage selectively with the FAST program, with 23% completing the program. Forty-five percent are employed at five weeks post-enrolment. Further exploration is needed to understand what these metrics are telling us and whether they are meaningful indicators of program success.
- Some FAST participants are struggling to understand how to navigate the online platform, the scope of what the program offers and the role of FAST in their job search.
- Some participants are finding that content is organized into overly long sections and lacks engaging audio and visual formats.
- Some participants are requesting more opportunities to interact with program staff, employers and other newcomers in the FAST program.

4.2 Continuous Improvement in Practice

IEC-BC has started to put in place more peer-to-peer and staff touch points

FAST participants express a desire for greater connection with IEC-BC staff and peers during and after the program. IEC-BC is responding to this learning by considering how to offer meaningful touch points without duplicating services already provided by other partners. IEC-BC has already started to offer drop-in sessions with participants to answer questions and provide support as needed. Other potential touch points could include regular check-ins during the program, webinars and virtual events with IEC-BC staff or an online community for participants to share experiences and resources with each other.

IEC-BC is working to strengthen the program's employer connections

From our qualitative research, we learned that FAST participants are interested in greater access to employers. IEC-BC is already responding by introducing FAST to employers and highlighting its newcomer candidates who are ready to work. IEC-BC is also working with the BC Care Providers Association to test direct-hiring initiatives where Association members incorporate FAST into hiring practices.

IEC-BC sees a role for itself in matching employers to suitable FAST candidates. Immediate next steps are to redesign the FAST program website to demonstrate the national reach and brand of the program and to work with platform developers to explore how employers and candidates can connect through the existing architecture.

IEC-BC is also connecting with like-minded organizations that are trying to solve the disconnect between employers with talent needs and skilled newcomers who are seeking jobs. The goal of FAST is to complement existing services, maximizing proven successes rather than duplicating or reinventing what FAST's service delivery partners already offer.



5. Conclusion

This report presents early findings on FAST program uptake and participant experience. Upcoming activities will offer more substantial insights on longer-term outcomes and program effectiveness as well as the overall scaling process that guided the work. In particular, we will aim to further understand the relationships between program design and delivery, program completion rates and participant employment rates – and how these operate in the context of a broader employment and skills ecosystem.

Additional evidence-generation activities will include interviews with industry and service delivery partners and a diary study with participants in the newly launched Seniors Care stream. These activities will help us further explore how FAST is perceived and experienced by key stakeholders.

During this upcoming phase, the IEC-BC team will continue to work in collaboration with the BC Care Providers Association to launch the Seniors Care stream. IEC-BC will also pursue activities to continue strengthening FAST's design and delivery across all streams.

Results from these evidence-generation activities and data collected throughout the scaling phase of the program (September 2021 to March 2023) – including a nine-month follow-up survey – will be available in Fall 2023. In 2024, Blueprint will begin analyzing long-term outcomes using linked administrative data held by Statistics Canada.

As IEC-BC continues to strengthen FAST, it will be in a stronger position to rigorously evaluate its causal impact on newcomers' career pathways. Over time, evidence-generation activities will shift to assess the sustainability and return on investment of a further scaled FAST program. This assessment will produce actionable lessons on both the long-term direction of the program and effective scaling processes that can inform similar initiatives across Canada.

Appendix A

Common Outcomes Framework

	Outcome	Indicators
Socio-demographics	Sex & Gender	Sex at birth
		Self-identified gender
	Age	Age
	Location	Province
		Region & Municipality
	Marital status	Marital status
	Children & Dependents	Children
		Dependents
		Household size
	Household Income	Household income
	Education	Highest credential obtained
		Location of highest credential attainment
	Indigenous Identity	Self-identified Indigenous identity
	Francophone status & languages spoken	First language spoken
		Official languages
		Language spoken at home
		Other languages spoken (At home)
Employment status and history	Employment	Place of birth
		Year of arrival
	Earnings	Citizenship status
		Racial identity
		Self-identification as member of racialized group
	Industry and occupation of employment	Disability
		Self-identified disability
		Employment status
	Work history	Nature of employment (permanent, temporary, full/part-time)
		Hours worked / week
		Wages
	Income source	Annual earnings
		NAICS code of job
	Income source	NOC code of job
		Time since last employed
		NOC code of job
	Income source	NAICS code of job
		Income sources

	Outcome	Indicators
Intermediate outcomes	Program completion	Successful completion of planned activities
	Participant satisfaction	Satisfaction with program
		Perceived Utility of Program
		Likelihood to recommend
Customized intermediate outcomes	Skills gains	Measured gains in specific skills
	Program-specific credential attainment	Attainment of program-specific credentials
Long-term outcomes	Employment and retention	Employment status
		Nature of employment (permanent, temporary, full/part-time)
		Retention
	Earnings	Hours worked / week
		Wages
		Annual earnings
	Benefits	Presence of benefits including: Paid leave, Health and dental coverage, Pension plan
	Industry and occupation of employment	NAICS code of job
		NOC code of job
	Job Satisfaction	Satisfaction with job
		Perceived opportunity for career advancement
		Perceived job security
	Enrolment in further education	Enrolment in further education
		Type of training
		Field of study
	Credential attainment	Attainment of high school or PSE credentials
		Field of study credentials

Appendix B

Diary Study Sample

A total of 10 participants consented to take part in the FAST diary study. Two participants took part in an initial pilot diary study¹ from January 21st to February 8th, 2022. Eight participants took part in our “full” diary study, from March 18th to May 17th, 2022. Blueprint leveraged IEC-BC data that was shared with the research team twice per week to identify newcomers who matched our selection criteria and invited them to participate in the diary study by email. Priority selection criteria included program stream, newcomer arrival status, and gender. Table B1 provides details about the full sample of participants who took part in the FAST diary study.

TABLE B1 | FAST Diary Study Sample

Sampling criteria		Total (out of 10)
Newcomer arrival status	Pre-arrival	3
	Arrived	7
FAST program stream	Accounting & Finance	3
	Biotechnology & Life Sciences	2
	IT & Data Services	5
Province	Ontario	5
	British Columbia	1
	Nova Scotia	2
	Manitoba	1
	Alberta	1
Gender	Female	4
	Male	6
Age	20–29	1
	30–39	5
	40–49	2
	50–59	2
FAST	In-program	4
	Referral partner	5
	Other: Found on own	1

¹ The pilot diary study was designed to test our recruitment processes, interview protocols, logging instructions for the WhatsApp text message “diaries” and troubleshoot any potential issues. For more information about our evaluation approach, please see Section 2: Evaluation-Generation Approach.

Appendix C

Exit Survey Demographics

